



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

COSMIC - 2nd OPEN CALL

AI & Data Solutions to Boost the Green Transition



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1. What is a startup in COSMIC?

In COSMIC, a startup is generally understood as a young, tech-oriented company. Typical characteristics include:

- Fewer than **10 employees** (but usually more than 2 full-time equivalent staff)
- Operating for **less than three years**
- Showing strong growth potential, for example, through early-stage private sector investment (e.g., over €50,000) or significant annual sales growth (e.g., more than 50%)

These characteristics are provided as guidance to give applicants a sense of the types of companies COSMIC typically supports.

2. What is an SME in COSMIC?

An SME is defined according to the **European Commission's Recommendation 2003/361/EC**. The criteria are:

- **Headcount:** fewer than 250 Annual Work Units (AWU),
- **Annual turnover:** ≤ €50 million **OR**
- **Annual balance sheet total:** ≤ €43 million.

Figures of partners and linked enterprises must also be considered (see the [SME User Guide](#)).

3. What does the application process look like?



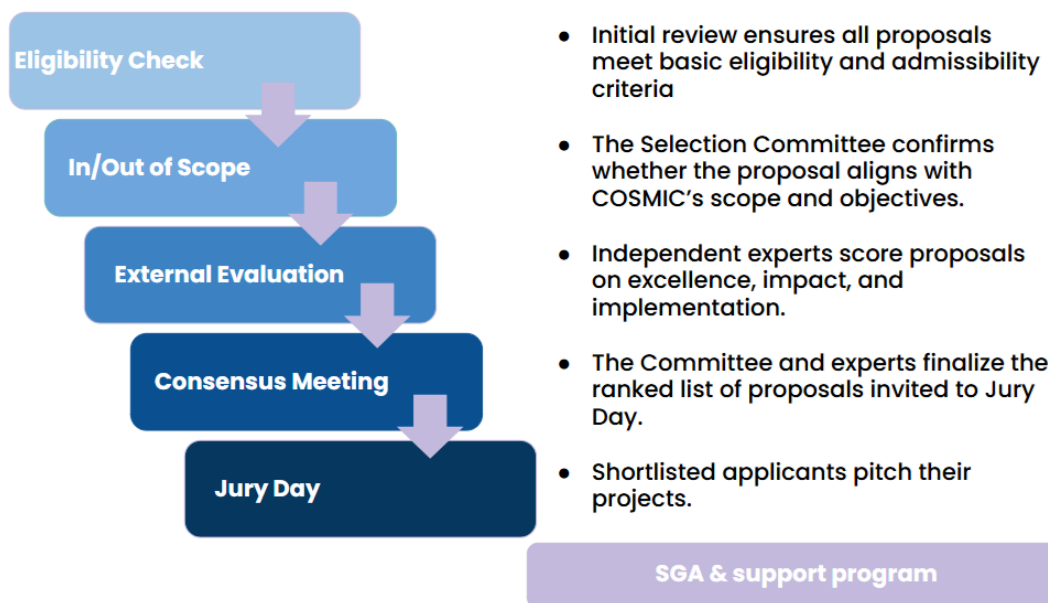
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The application process is simple and fully online. First, go to [the application portal](#) and register. Make sure to **read the [Guide for Applicants](#) and [Technical Guidelines](#)** before starting your application.

You can then fill in the mandatory fields and submit your proposal - but **don't wait until the last moment!** Remember, **you can edit and update your application** as many times as needed before the deadline.

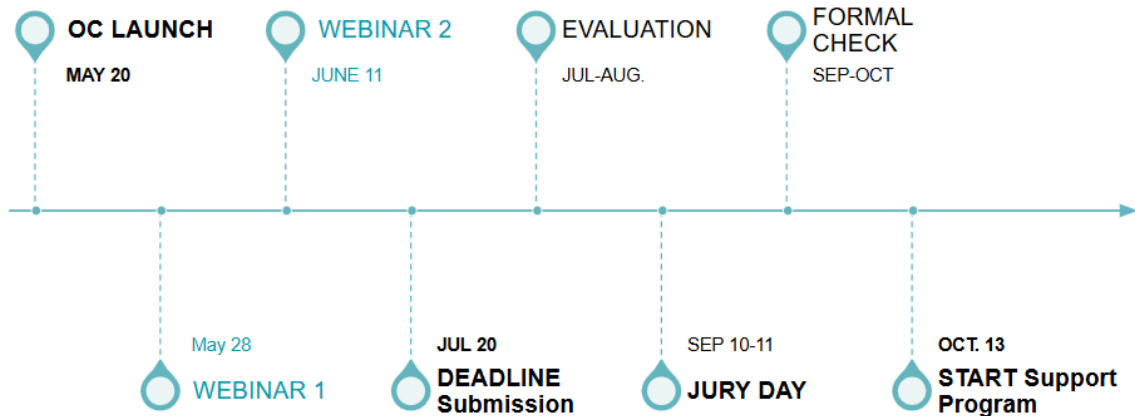
4. What does the selection process look like?

The selection process includes the following phases:



5. What is the tentative timeline for the COSMIC Open Call?

The key (tentative) dates in the open call timeline are as follows:



**Estimated dates*

6. When will the evaluation phase be concluded, and when will projects start?

The evaluation phase is planned to conclude by the end of August 2026, and applicants will be informed of the results shortly after. The support program is scheduled to start in October 2026.

7. What Technology Readiness Level (TRL) is required for proposals?

The **Technology Readiness Level (TRL)** is a scale from **1 to 9** used to assess the maturity of a technology, from initial concept (**TRL 1**) to a proven system in operational use (**TRL 9**).

For COSMIC:

- Solutions should start at a **minimum of TRL 3**, with initial validation at a small scale (typically TRL 3–5).
- Through COSMIC's industrial pilots, the solution should be ready for further testing, refinement, and demonstration to reach **higher maturity (TRL 6–7)**.

TRL scale overview:

TRL	Description
1	Basic principles observed
2	Technology concept formulated

TRL	Description
3	Experimental proof of concept
4	Technology validated in lab
5	Technology validated in relevant environment
6	Technology demonstrated in relevant environment
7	System prototype demonstrated in operational environment
8	System complete and qualified
9	Actual system proven in operational use

8. Is it possible to apply as a consortium of two SMEs?

No. Only **individual SMEs or startups** can apply. Applications from consortia are not eligible.

9. If a consortium of two SMEs applied, would both need to submit the Declaration of Honour and other documents?

Not applicable, since **consortia are not eligible**. Only individual SMEs and startups can apply.

Please note that at this stage, we do not ask for any additional documents. Applicants only need to upload the **Gantt chart**.

10. Will sample data from pilot companies/cities be available before the end of the application period (20 July 2026)?

No, it will not be possible to test solutions with data from the pilot companies/cities before the submission deadline. Data and COSMIC tools will be made available to selected applicants once the support programme starts. If you have specific questions regarding individual pilots, please send your inquiry to helpdesk.cosmic@fundingbox.com

11. Can the applicant apply with its own pilot/use case, or must the project be based only on listed/participating pilots?

Please note that COSMIC applications must be based on the listed pilots; external pilots or use cases are not eligible.

12. Is the 2nd COSMIC Open Call open only to SMEs? If so, can a Research & Technology Organisation (RTO) participate as a subcontractor to an SME applicant?

Please note that only SMEs and start-ups (both for-profit and non-profit) are eligible to apply. Non-profit organisations that do not meet the SME/start-up definition under EC Recommendation 2003/361/EC are not eligible to apply directly.

However, subcontracting is possible. It must be described and justified in the application form, may cover only a limited part of the action (up to 15% of the maximum grant), and must be performed in eligible countries. Please note that the essential activities of the proposals submitted by SMEs/start-ups cannot be subcontracted.

13. Would the COSMIC Open Call include AI-based approaches for sustainable transport systems or optimising energy-related infrastructure to support the green transition?

Each proposal must align with **one defined challenge out of the 16 challenges** outlined in the call. An SME or start-up may apply to up to 3 different challenges, one per proposal. The [Technical Guidelines](#) provide detailed descriptions of these challenges to help determine where a particular idea may fit.

14. Are UK startups eligible to apply?

Yes. UK entities are eligible as the United Kingdom is an Associated Country to Horizon Europe.

15. If applying from a non-EU country (e.g. Norway), is an EU partner required?

No. Entities from countries listed as Associated Countries - even if they are not EU Member States - may apply independently under the same conditions as EU applicants, provided they

are not explicitly excluded and do not have additional eligibility restrictions. **Consortia are not eligible; only single-entity applications are accepted.**

16. Are the TRL requirements strict, and what are the starting and target TRLs?

Yes. Proposals must aim to reach a **Technology Readiness Level (TRL) between 6 and 7** by the end of the project. This means your solution must start at a **minimum of TRL 3**, with initial validation at a small scale (typically TRL 3–5), and be ready for further testing, refinement, and demonstration through COSMIC’s industrial pilots to reach higher maturity (TRL 6–7).

17. Can applicants submit industry-focused solutions?

Yes. While COSMIC includes challenges related to residential applications, the project explicitly targets large-scale energy resource optimisation and also encourages industrial-focused solutions. COSMIC builds an ecosystem where large industries provide datasets and pilot sites, and SMEs contribute AI- and data-driven innovations. Solutions integrating AI for energy and IT management in industrial infrastructures are fully aligned with the project’s mission and are eligible to participate, especially if they can be validated in large-scale pilots in industrial or urban environments.

However, the most important aspect is that your solution **directly addresses the objectives of the specific challenge**, as alignment with the challenge is critical for evaluation and impact assessment in the call.

18. Is there an “open track” or must applications address specific challenges?

Each proposal must target one of the published thematic challenges.

19. Do proposals need to align with all relevant Core Technical Facilitators (CTFs) for the chosen challenge?

No. Proposals should demonstrate strong alignment with **at least one** relevant CTF for the selected challenge.

20. What exactly should third parties do with the CTFs?

CTFs are provided for two main purposes:

- To provide support (e.g., data) and, if necessary, an execution environment for SME solutions.
- To support the deployment and scaling of solutions in the pilots.

Some challenges will provide pilot data in a unified way (e.g., via an API), so SMEs do not have to handle disparate data sources or poor documentation. Other challenges will integrate to address the full use case.

21. Where can I find detailed technical information about the Core Technical Facilitators (CTFs) and Core Social Facilitator (CSF)?

All CTFs and CSF descriptions and documentation are available in the [Technical Guidelines](#).

22. Does the project scope need to be for consumer solutions, or can it also be for facility solutions?

The project scope does not need to be limited to consumer solutions. Solutions can also target facilities, industrial environments, or other non-consumer contexts, as long as they address the objectives and requirements of the challenge.

23. Should proposals include data collection, or do some challenges already have it implemented in the CTF? How can applicants access information on existing data, and should it be included in the budget?

Some challenges already have data collection in place, while others require proposals to include it. Technical details are in the [Technical Guidelines](#), and for additional information, please contact the helpdesk. Include any necessary data collection in your budget if not already provided.

24. Do I always need a hardware component for my project?

No. You do not always need a hardware component. Your proposal can focus solely on software, AI, or digital solutions if that represents the core of your work. Any hardware included

can be described as supporting or enabling your main solution, but it is not mandatory unless explicitly stated in the Challenge description.

25. Do we need to use and provide the Excel budget table from Horizon Europe? Are there guidelines on how to use it?

No, you **do not need to attach an Excel file** when submitting your application. The application form includes a dedicated **budget section**, where you should provide information on eligible costs such as personnel, travel, subcontracting, and other relevant expenses. This section outlines what types of costs can be included and how they should be presented in your proposal.

26. Are overhead costs included within the €150,000 grant?

Yes. Overheads are part of the granted amount and cannot be added on top.

27. Are letters of intent or CVs for subcontractors required at submission?

No, they are not required at submission

28. What does “30% co-financing” mean?

Each for-profit SME or startup must cover **30% of the total budget** on their side. COSMIC funding will cover up to **70%** of the project budget (up to €150,000 per beneficiary).

29. What document is needed to confirm that 30% co-financing has been secured?

There is no specific document required. The funding is provided as a **lump sum**, and payments are made against the approved deliverables, mandatory at each milestone. Ensuring co-financing is the **responsibility of the beneficiary**.

30. How does the 30% co-financing for for-profit companies work?

For-profit SMEs must provide **30% co-financing**. For example:

- If the **COSMIC grant is €150,000** (covering 70% of the total project budget),
- The **total project budget** would be approximately **€214,286**,

- The company must contribute the remaining **€64,286 (30%)** from its own funds.

This ensures that COSMIC covers up to 70% of the project costs, while the applicant provides at least 30% as self-financing.

31. Is an in-kind contribution accepted as part of the co-financing?

Yes, in-kind contributions such as personnel time, equipment use, or lab access may be accepted. In your application, you can briefly explain how you plan to provide this required contribution, including personal effort from company founders and work by any hired staff.

32. Can a SME owner working on the project as a freelancer (not receiving a salary) be included under “personnel costs”?

Yes, an SME owner who is actively working on the project can be included under “personnel costs” even if they are not receiving a salary as an employee, as long as the compensation reflects actual work contributed to the project.

The key is that the payment must correspond to the time and effort spent on project tasks. If the compensation is more in the form of an external service contract unrelated to actual personnel effort, then it should be reported under “services”.

33. Should the proposal list exact names of all team members, or is it enough to indicate roles?

It is sufficient to indicate the **roles or positions** of team members (e.g., project manager, Python programmer, data analyst) rather than their exact names. Only the core team may be named if relevant.

34. Who will own the intellectual property (IPR) of the developed and researched solution?

In accordance with [the Guide for Applicants \(Section 7\)](#), the intellectual property rights (IPR) to results generated under the project will remain with the participant who has produced them. Each beneficiary retains ownership of its own results.

Where results are jointly developed with COSMIC consortium partners and cannot be reasonably separated, such results shall be subject to joint ownership. In such cases, the

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parties concerned will establish a joint ownership agreement defining the terms of use and exploitation.

The European Union does not claim ownership of any results generated under this project. For detailed provisions, please refer to *Article 27 (Ownership of Results)* of the [Sub-Grant Agreement template](#).

35. Can companies reuse the developed software after the project?

Yes. Beneficiaries may reuse and commercialise their results, provided COSMIC visibility requirements and any applicable licensing obligations are respected.

36. Please clarify IPR. In ideal examples, the final review involves providing the full source code, AI models, and other relevant materials. How does this align with the statement that IPR will remain with the applicant?

Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) remain with the applicant. Sharing source code, AI models, or other materials for review is solely for evaluation purposes and does **not transfer ownership**. Applicants retain full rights to their work and can decide how to use or commercialise it.

Where results are **jointly developed** with COSMIC consortium partners and cannot be reasonably separated, such results will be subject to **joint ownership**, with a joint ownership agreement defining the terms of use and exploitation.

37. If we publish open adapters, what type of licensing is acceptable (e.g., open source, permissive)?

Published open adapters should use an **open-source license**. Permissive licenses are acceptable, provided they comply with the project's requirements and any applicable COSMIC visibility rules.

38. Are there financial eligibility requirements (e.g. profitability or positive cash flow)?

Applicants must demonstrate financial capacity to implement the project. Entities that are facing financial difficulties will not be eligible to receive funding.

39. Do startups / SMEs need to submit a balance sheet or other documents when applying?

No, you do **not need to attach any documents when submitting your application**. If your proposal is selected, you will be asked to provide documents to **confirm your formal status and eligibility** before signing the Sub-Grant Agreement.

These documents may include (but are not limited to): company registration, legal representation (or power of attorney), tax ID number, ownership structure, financial statements, staff headcount, and bank identification details. The COSMIC Consortium will verify them before confirming your participation in the programme.

40. Does the financial check require sharing only last year's annual report? For eligibility, is prior positive cash flow or profitability required, or does financial difficulty automatically exclude an applicant?

The financial check is not limited to last year's annual report and may require other financial documents to assess the applicant's capacity and stability. The annual report (or financial statements) from the last year is typically one of the documents required as part of the financial check process. Thanks to them, we can review your balance sheet, profit and loss statement and equity position to assess whether your organisation falls under the definition of an "undertaking in difficulty" and whether your financial situation meets the programme's eligibility criteria.

There is no strict rule that you must show a profit or positive cash flow to be eligible. However, continuous losses or negative cash flow may indicate that the organisation is in financial difficulty, which could lead to exclusion or require a restructuring assessment. In practice, we will look at whether your balance sheet is stable, whether losses exceed acceptable limits, and whether equity has been significantly reduced.

If the company meets the criteria of an "undertaking in difficulty", it generally cannot receive any grant in the COSMIC project.

41. When will the funding be awarded and how is it paid?

Once your eligibility is confirmed and the **Sub-Grant Agreement** is signed, you will become an official beneficiary of the COSMIC programme. Selected grantees receive a **fixed lump sum of up to €150,000**.

The payment is made in **four instalments**, each released **after the evaluation and successful completion of the corresponding project stage**.

The lump sum simplifies expense reporting - you **do not need to submit detailed invoices**, but you must show that the project progresses according to the milestones in your *Individual Mentoring Plan* (IMP). Progress and quality of work are assessed during interim reviews.

42. Which is the withholding percentage for the funding awarded?

The withholding rate of funding for the companies selected through the 2nd open call is 20% of the total grant awarded. Withheld amount will be paid upon completion of the COSMIC project.

43. Where can be found the recordings of the previous webinars?

The last webinar on how to apply for the 2nd COSMIC Open Call can be found under [this link](#).

44. Is there a way to export the template from the online application system?

No, the template cannot be exported from the online application system. However, the application **does allow adding contributors**, and can be edited anytime until the submission deadline.

45. Can graphics/figures be added to the application form, or is it possible to attach a technical annex?

No. As per section 3.4 ("Ground rules") of the Guide for Applicants, it is not possible to submit a separate technical annex or include graphics. If the proposal is selected for Jury Days, applicants will have the opportunity to provide further details then.

46. Will there be future submission rounds?

COSMIC is currently running its second and last Open Call. No additional submission rounds are foreseen.

47. How many applications are expected?

We received over 350 applications for the first open call and a similar performance is expected for the second. However, we aim to select 32 applicants for Jury Day and up to 13 final beneficiaries.

48. How many applications can one entity submit?

You may submit up to three proposals in total – one per challenge. However, **only one proposal per entity can be selected for funding**. Multiple submissions to the same challenge are not allowed; if more than one proposal is submitted for the same challenge, only the most recent one will be evaluated.

49. For Challenge 20, must the >1000 participant sample be drawn from the pilot populations, or is it the applicant's responsibility to source a representative panel?

Securing the sample is the applicant's responsibility. The required sample should NOT be drawn from the pilots but rather represent similar populations (e.g., individuals in vulnerable situations) using approaches like a panel provider or validated synthetic samples.

50. For challenge 28, there is a requirement for the solution to be open source, can you please provide more detail on this?

The solution should be delivered as fully open source and its use should be free for use in the project and for the pilot afterwards. The beneficiaries can choose the type of permissive licence that they wish to use (provided that it allows free use and further adaptation of the software and integration with other solutions for own use).

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As a general rule, the intellectual property will stay in the company and it will be the proprietor of the future and pre-existing know-how (which may stay outside the open-source code release if not necessary for the solution). There is no objection to the beneficiaries' companies commercializing services, either.

51. For Challenge 29, which is the split of responsibility between the beneficiary and the pilot partner for recruiting/engaging the ~40 households for validation?

Onboarding community members is the responsibility of the pilot partner, not the beneficiary.

52. For Challenge 29, will a dataset of Portuguese energy invoices/benchmarking be provided for AI training?

An extensive dataset is not available, but templates from different energy suppliers/retailers can be sourced. Applicants are expected to source and prepare their own training data, which will be supplemented by pilot users providing their own invoices during the project.

53. For Challenge 31, how does the current decision-making workflow and what "useful" output looks like?

In the pilot where the solution will be validated, an internal eligibility form/template that awards scoring to potential interventions based on social, technical, and financial criteria is used.

The primary objective of the tool should be to optimize which buildings are prioritized based on these social, technical, or practical/financial reasons. Currently, decision-making relies on the following parameters:

- Social factors: Vulnerability, rental arrears, number of occupants/housing capacity, occupancy status, and presence of illegal occupancy.
- Technical factors: Unfavourable IEE (Informe de Evaluación del Edificio), efficiency of the building certificate CEE (Certificado de Eficiencia Energética), history of previous renovations, and tenure status.
- Funding suitability: Proportional regional allocation and ensuring compliance with the specific criteria for grants and funding, which vary by program (e.g., FEDER, Programme 6, etc.).

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The tool should be designed as a "predictive tool." It does not necessarily need to use actual/real-time data; instead, it should be based on established prototypes (to be systematized) and technical building data primarily related to energy issues (e.g., year of construction, climate zone, construction methods, past refurbishments, and data from the IEE and CEE). It must be able to predict the most suitable technical intervention. Additionally, the interventions themselves should be systematized, with the potential to be implemented as industrialized solutions.

Furthermore, data on climate resilience must be integrated, as the proposed interventions must remain compliant at the time of funding and for at least five years thereafter.

54. For Challenge 31, which are the Key performance indicators being currently considered?

The indicators currently being taken into account in the pilot where the solution will be validated are aligned with the FEDER framework for the 2021–2027 period. Your proposal should focus on the following key metrics:

- RCO65: Capacity of new or modernised social housing units.
- RCO18: Number of dwellings with improved energy efficiency.
- RCR29: Estimated greenhouse gas emissions.
- RCR26: Annual primary energy consumption (broken down by dwellings, public buildings, businesses, and others).

MEET THE CONSORTIUM

